

To learn from it, however, they must be reminded of it. If our children are not reminded of the heroism of Sept. 11, they will not learn to be brave. If they do not learn about the great and noble things our country has done, they will not learn to be patriotic. If they do not learn to be brave and patriotic, our nation is in grave danger. Today's children are tomorrow's soldiers, citizens, and leaders. They will be called on to defend our country—to defend *their* country—in the years to come. They must be prepared to do so.

In order to do so effectively, we must all be able to see through fogs of moral obtusation and political correctness. The reluctance of college students to state that Western civilization is superior to Arabic civilization is not surprising. A poll of students by the National Association of Scholars found that three-quarters of American college students say their professors teach them that right and wrong depend "on differences in individual values and cultural diversity."

You may recall that, shortly after Sept. 11, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy asserted that Western civilization was "superior" to that of Islam. As you might expect, the guardians of political correctness were up in arms: "Simply unacceptable" and "deeply dangerous rankings," complained the *Washington Post*; other newspapers and international leaders added that the comments were "absurd," "Neanderthal," "disgusting," and "outrageous." Put aside the question of whether or not Berlusconi's remarks were impolite. Let us focus on the simple question of whether they were true. Could it be that Western civilization is superior to Islamic civilization?

It is hard to look at the world today and argue otherwise. The Western world has led to a standard of living unprecedented in human history. It has guaranteed a system of rights and liberties for men and women that are all but unknown in the Islamic world. Scientific progress has benefited rich and poor, young and old. Throughout the Western world, there is a degree of human flourishing that is absent from the suffering that characterizes life for so many in the Middle East.

As Berlusconi said, Western civilization "has guaranteed well-being, respect for human rights and . . . respect for religious and political rights"; it is a "system that has as its values understandings of diversity and tolerance." While he was wrong to deny that such "respect for human rights and religion" existed anywhere in the Islamic world, it is all but inarguable that such respect is the rare exception, and certainly not the rule.

Islamic civilization does have a noble heritage of its own. During the Middle Ages, for instance, Islamic scientists and philosophers made contributions that remain valuable even to this day. Yet, for the past several centuries, as historian Bernard Lewis reminds us,

Islamic civilization has remained stagnant, while the West has flourished.

I believe that one reason the West has flourished while Islamic civilization has remained stagnant is that the spirit of democracy and liberty in the West encourages questioning, debate, and progress. To learn about the value of capitalism, we read John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. To learn about the value of the religious life, we read Thomas Aquinas and Voltaire. To learn about the ends of politics, we read Aristotle and Machiavelli. To learn about the value of warfare, we read Homer and Erasmus. To learn about the worth of sexual fidelity, we read Leo Tolstoy and James Joyce. Our intellectual tradition is not monolithic; it is, rather, an ongoing conversation.

DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE

As Berlusconi said, we value diversity—especially intellectual diversity—and tolerance in a way that no other civilization does. Western civilization demands inquiry and leads to progress at a rate and of a degree previously unknown to mankind. The tradition of liberalism and liberal education in the West has led to human liberation to think, dream, and live.

As political philosopher A.E. Murphy put it many decades ago, "We do not understand the ideals of other cultures better by misunderstanding our own or adequately enrich an intercultural synthesis by offering to it anything less than the best we have. That best is the theory and practices of intellectual, moral, and political freedom, in a form and at a level which neither medieval, Mexican, Manchu, nor Muscovite culture has so far equaled."

I will never forget the scenes that occurred in November, 2001, when the American and British forces liberated Kabul. Burqas were cast off; beards were shaved; and television sets were dug out of the ground. An entire city celebrated the end of strict Islamic rule. This event suggested that cultures and values are not so different after all. Anyone who saw the pictures of people suddenly free to speak, dress, learn, work, and worship as they saw fit would be hard-pressed to deny a universal human longing for freedom.

Simple honesty ought to compel us to state—and to do so proudly—that, while the longing is universal, one particular cultural tradition has most fully nourished it. That tradition is ours, and students ought to be made aware of it and its successes.

Since the beginning of time, political philosophers have recognized the importance of patriotism. One of Plato's first